

The Evolution of Forest Certification and “Sustainable Forestry”

By *Bill Jones*, Alabama Forestry Association

The oldest forestry certification program in the United States began in 1941 out of public concern for management of private forests. That year, wood-using industries were approached by the USDA to commit themselves to grow repeated crops of timber on that land.

The Tree Farm System was started under that same initiative, and in 1942 Alabama became the first state to recognize private landowners. Several of the 1942 Tree Farms are still current in the program today. The American Forest Foundation has recruited 46 state committees and 4,400 inspecting foresters to support the Tree Farm System that includes 73,000 family forest owners and 29 million acres of certified sustainable forests. Certified Tree Farms must have a written management plan, meet the guidelines of the program and legal requirements of the state, be inspected by a Tree Farm trained forester, and maintain that inspection every five years.

Where Did the Forest Sustainability Issue Begin?

In 1987 the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization issued a global concern for the significant loss of timberland. Using satellite technology, their assessment showed the loss of forests at 27 million acres a year, of which the changes in forest type and land use can

be debated, depending on international need for wood fiber, agricultural and energy needs, and financial demands on growing populations. The global picture of sustainable forestry is complex, depending on the social, economic, and

ed a series of subsequent meetings to quantify and qualify acceptable forest practices of “sustainability,” first known as the Helsinki Process. In 1993 the governments of 12 non-European countries met in Montreal, Canada for the purpose of establishing for the management of land conservation of Temperate and Boreal Forests.

Soon after these events, the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) was formed by environmental organizations to protect and conserve tropical forest products. FSC has grown to include participation in 72 countries and over 170 million acres of forest lands providing an ‘eco-label’ for timber products and a stakeholder system for forest management.

The American Forest and Paper Association also rolled out the Sustainable Forestry

Initiative program in 1994 to provide certification access to forest product companies. The Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) now includes 200 companies and 150 million acres of certified timberland. The Society of American Foresters report, “Forest Management Certification,” defined criteria and indicators and provided context for setting evaluation and standards for forest certification in 1995.

Green Tag was developed by consulting foresters in northeastern states by the National Forestry Association, solely for use by private landowners and involves third party certification on a five-year

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Photo by Jim Morris

*Alabama's 2006 Tree Farmer of the Year winners:
Felicia and Lamar Dewberry*

environmental constraints between developed and developing countries. In 1992 the issue of forest sustainability was pushed to the front page of the UN Conference on the Environment at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro.

Following the Summit many methods were rolled out to address the framework of sustainable forestry. Meanwhile, environmental organizations were strongly protesting the use of tropical hardwoods and forest products worldwide. The International Tropical Timber Organization adopted 5 criteria and 27 indicators to guide member governments on the management of long-term forest estates. The European Community start-

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basis. Green Tag requires sustainable forestry to be practiced by the landowner through forest management planning that utilizes forest health, inventory, and natural diversity concepts.

During this development period of forest sustainability certification programs, the Pan European community rolled out the Program for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) covering 85% of the world’s forests in 149 countries. The PEFC’s mission is to provide a framework for the recognition of forest certification schemes that have been developed on a local scale to meet the intent of internationally recognized management measures.

Twenty Years in the Making, Still Some Curves Ahead

After years of wrangling with regulatory restrictions and the politics of the Endangered Species Act and the Clean Water Act, environmental interests have taken concerns directly to the marketplace to influence “environmental performance,” not just on public lands but also private land. Time Warner, Staples, and Home Depot are just a few that are implementing procurement policies that reflect environmental responsibility. Interestingly enough, some of these procurement policies are beginning to identify products with certification labels. Does certification or labeling actually add value to the product? Not necessarily, as once expected, but in some cases

certification is required for market access.

Another late comer to the certification arena is Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED), introduced by the US Green Building Council. LEED is aimed at improving the environmental performance and economic returns for buildings. Architectural design requirements prefer recyclable materials, those produced locally, and only those certified by FSC. LEED requirements are showing up now in the bid requirements for public buildings, indicating that certification specifications to architects are important. Green Globes is an alternative certification program being launched by building associations which offers some additional options to architects and builders, and may be friendlier to wood.

Also the American Loggers Council developed their own brand of certification to meet similar management measures of certification programs. Now the Master Logger is specific to the harvesting process and is being implemented in seven states, mainly in the northwest and border states with Canada. Logging associations in seven additional states have made a move to develop a template to meet international standards for certification, simply to allow loggers to carry the certification responsibility for timber harvesting.

Quite an investment has been made by industry to clearly define the objectives of forest sustainability and establish

indicators of performance. Under the SFI program, participants have identified seven key measures to indicate compliance on company-controlled lands. Objective 8 identifies the partnership between an SFI company and compliance with their business partners such as loggers and landowners. Additional objectives provide measures for evaluating standards for research, training, legal compliance, public and landowner involvement, and continual improvement.

So What Does Forest Certification Mean to the Alabama Landowner?

Number one on the list would be to continue to manage forest resources wisely and to use professional assistance where needed. Second, would be to request that forest operations be carried out by contractors that have completed and are current with training standards. Number three, you pay the ad valorem tax so you should make the decision on what programs are right for you and the management of your land. Private landowners make up the highest percentage of ownership in Alabama’s forest landscape and at last tally, our forest inventory showed that timber volume was at the highest level in fifty years. So with over 200,000 Alabama private landowners making good decisions on “Forest Sustainability,” it should be noted that private landowners in Alabama are already doing a good job.

However, as market pressures dictate that a seal of good housekeeping is needed, there will be increased interest from manufacturers for meeting certification standards. Each system will require auditing to assure that forest management objectives can effectively be measured and evaluated. That process is well underway for subscribers to the Sustainable Forestry Initiative. Third-party auditing measures each management practice for water quality, endangered species, special site protection, harvesting utilization, and performance. Tree Farm also is evaluating how well its participating landowners meet similar management objectives. Also, Tree Farm is beginning guidance for

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Certification Groups

<i>American Forest Foundation</i>	<i>Green Globes</i>
<i>American Forest & Paper Association</i>	<i>Green Tag</i>
<i>American Loggers Council</i>	<i>Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design (LEED)</i>
<i>Architectural & Building Materials Building Associations</i>	<i>Master Logger</i>
<i>Ecolabelling</i>	<i>National Forestry Association</i>
<i>Forest Stewardship Council</i>	<i>Program for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC)</i>
<i>Forest Sustainability Certification</i>	<i>Sustainable Forestry Initiative</i>
	<i>Tree Farm System</i>

Recognizing that it is not the only entity that actively conserves open space, the Forest Service cannot regulate development or land use, but *can* provide expertise, resources, and programs to assist landowner and other partners in conserving more open spaces. The Conservation Fund was asked to set up three regional Roundtable Dialogue Listening Sessions in Chapel Hill, North Carolina; Denver, Colorado; and Washington, DC to bring together a diverse group of partners and record feedback on how the Forest Service can most effectively contribute to a national effort for conserving open spaces.

In my Economic Development role in the Management Division of the Alabama Forestry Commission, I attended the session in Chapel Hill. Other groups represented included The Conservation Fund, National Wild Turkey Foundation, USDA Forest Service, Cierra Publishing Company, Georgia Forestry Commission, Southern Environmental Law Center, Mississippi Forestry Commission, Land Loss Prevention Project, Handmade In America, Virginia Department of Forestry, North Carolina Forestry Association, North Carolina League of Municipalities, North Carolina Division of Forestry, Meridian Institute, Sandhills Area Land Trust, Conservation Trust for North Carolina, and two local community development groups.

Discussions at the session were very open with all participants providing good comments, recognizing that all are concerned about the same issues and are willing to work together as partners to conserve rapidly declining open space. Deliberations focused on three key areas of concern:

- Private forest lands and surrounding landscapes
- National forests, grasslands, and surrounding landscapes
- Urban forests and surrounding landscapes

Topics included tools currently being employed (Stewardship, Legacy, Cooperative Forest Health, Southern Pine Beetle Prevention & Restoration, Forest Land Enhancement Program, and Rural Economic Action Programs), most effective tools now or past (economic action and forestry incentives programs),

and new tools or techniques that could be employed or developed to conserve open spaces.

Recommendations from the listening session in Chapel Hill included:

- Funding for old programs that worked to create new forest land (Forestry Incentive Program and Stewardship Incentive Program)
- Timber crop insurance (federal insurance) for natural threats to forests (weather, insects, disease)
- Funding to continue programs already in place through state forestry agencies, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Farm Service Agency
- Research and development of technologies to convert woody biomass to energy
- Alternative incomes from forests (recreation, carbon credits, and other “ecosystem services”) to offset landowners’ management expenses
- Redirect funding for ALL federal forestry-related programs through USDA Forest Service to state forestry agencies
- Landowners need to be more involved in their local communities’ development process
- More active management on national forests, using income to fund stewardship programs on adjoining private forests
- More aggressive tax incentive programs for private landowners
- Environmental Protection Agency subsidy to private landowners to maintain healthy forests for land conservation, air quality, water quality, habitat for wildlife, and threatened & endangered species
- Manage “pockets” of urban forests and expand urban forests programs
- Utilize the state forests to educate the public with handouts, publications, and promotional items
- “Get Involved” with task forces, committees, boards, and associations that deal with environmental issues that impact forest resources, because “If you are not part of the process, you may be processed!” ☸

For current information on the Southern Pine Beetle situation in Alabama, visit our web page at: www.forestry.state.al.us

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group certification to landowners that are already under management provided by a group manager.

Number four, landowners need to look at each of these programs carefully. The Alabama Forestry Association will post to its www.alaforestry.org website, under the members section, an in-depth continuing education program specific to the details of each of these certification systems. The Association website will also provide links to other sites that provide insight to forest certification.

Number five, consider the familiar green and white sign of good forestry. Tree Farm has been around since 1942 and has gone through significant changes. Over 1,600 Alabama landowners are already involved, managing over six million private acres of “certified forests.” Some recent changes include meeting the standards for international certification and providing guidance for administering group certification through the American Forest Foundation. ☸

Find Out More:

www.alaforestry.org

www.af&pa.org

www.treefarmssystem.org

Literature Cited

Forest Certification Auditing: A Guide for Practitioners. *Society of American Foresters*, 2005c.

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